

Federal agencies release draft environmental impact statement on Libby & Hungry Horse Dam operation

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SEATTLE - Long-term implementation of alternative flood control and fish operations at Montana's Libby and Hungry Horse Dams is the focus of a draft environmental impact statement, which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation released on Nov. 10. The alternative flood control operation is termed VARQ - an abbreviation of "variable Q," signifying a variable discharge option.

This draft environmental impact statement is the agencies' response to recommendations by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service in their December 2000 biological opinions on operating the Federal Columbia River Power System dams to protect stocks of fish listed as threatened and endangered.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation request that the public review this draft environmental impact statement. Comments will be reviewed and incorporated in a final environmental impact statement scheduled for completion for early in 2006.

"We know this is a topic of considerable interest to the public in the upper Columbia areas of the U.S. and Canada, and we anticipate a number of comments," said Mr. Evan Lewis of the Corps' Environmental Resources Section in its Seattle District office.

The Corps and Reclamation will host seven public meetings to provide an opportunity for the public to present oral and/or written comments on the draft environmental impact statement. All meetings start at 6:00 p.m. local time on the following dates at these locations:

November 28, 2005:

Best Western Baker Street Inn, 153 Baker St., Nelson, British Columbia, Canada

Kalispell Center Hotel, 20 N Main St, Kalispell, MT

November 29, 2005:

Elementary School Cafeteria, 1201 W 5th St., Newport, WA

November 30, 2005:

High School Auditorium, 340 - 9th St. E., Eureka, MT

KC Diner, 125 3rd Ave., Kettle Falls, WA

December 1, 2005:

Kootenai River Inn, 7169 Plaza St., Bonners Ferry, ID

Grand Coulee City Hall, 306 Midway Ave., Grand Coulee, WA

The Corps will host the meetings at Eureka, Bonners Ferry, and Nelson. Reclamation will host the meetings at Kalispell, Kettle Falls, and Grand Coulee. Both agencies will co-host the meeting in Newport. From 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., resource specialists will answer questions. From 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., residents can provide oral and written comments for the record.

The complete draft document is available online, under "Upper Columbia Alternative Flood Control and Fish Operations" at <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/VARQ>.

Copies of the complete draft document will also be available for public review at many libraries throughout the upper Columbia River basin.

Send requests for a mailed compact disk, executive summary (40 pages), or copy of the draft environmental impact statement (1200 pages) to Mr. Evan Lewis, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O.

Box 3755, Seattle, WA 98124-3755.

Copies may also be requested by calling (206) 764-6922 or e-mailing uceis@usace.army.mil

Comments should be mailed directly to Mr. Lewis at the preceding address, faxed to him at (206) 764-4470, or emailed to uceis@usace.army.mil. To ensure consideration, comments should be sent no later than Jan. 3, 2006.

For more information, please contact Mr. Evan Lewis at (206) 764-6922 or evan.r.lewis@usace.army.mil.